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A STUDY OF SOME METHODS TO IMPROVE WORD ATTACK SKILLS
of
SELECTED SECOND GRADE CHILDREN

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Children need a good background of experiences in order for words to have significant meaning for them. Words acquire meaning by being associated with objects, situations, and experiences. The teacher provides experiences which build a background for developing reading skills.

Skill in recognizing words develops as the child masters a basic sight vocabulary of fifty to one hundred words. The child can learn to recognize a whole word about as easily as he can recognize one letter. The child learns to recognize words by means of the following clues: configuration; meaning; picture; and kinesthetic.

The study of phonics begins when children are ready to learn the sounds of individual letters, blends or word parts. Phonic readiness is considered an important part of many reading programs. The child is ready to benefit fully from instruction in phonics when he becomes sensitive to the likenesses and differences in sounds presented to him. By studying phonics children develop an independent method of word attack which is so important when they read the many materials presented to them.

Children begin by studying the initial consonant sounds. They proceed to simple and then more difficult blends. Various word parts are presented and mastered. The child next practices blending these elements into words. He soon develops skill in analyzing and blending new words successfully.

This thesis describes a study which was conducted in a second grade to determine the methods which a teacher might use to improve the word attack skills of the retarded readers in her class. Three children retarded in reading were chosen to participate in a special activities program. A careful study of each child's needs and abilities was made. A detailed plan of remediation was evolved.

Three case studies describe the particular procedures used with each child. Materials and their use are described as each child's progress is noted during the seven month period of the study.

Case Study I tells of a faster learner who had lost instructional time in first grade. By reviewing first grade skills this child was able to advance to grade level in a short time. The child's good home background and above average ability enabled him to make great gains from the remedial program offered.

Case Study II describes a slow learner who was weak in the skills he had studied in first grade. Great improvement was made by this child. A good home background and the use of techniques suited to his needs enabled him to improve.

Case Study III describes a slow learner who was very weak in reading skills. He made small gains from the remedial program. The teacher concluded that a more extensive program of a longer period would have helped this child make more substantial improvements.

The general success of this program has been primarily due to the amount of individual help and time provided for each child. Substantial gains have been made by working closely with these children for a period of seven months. It is therefore recommended that many of the methods described in this thesis might be used with other children needing help in improving their word attack skills.